

IS THE HISTORIC MYSTERY OF THE SPHINX SOLVED AT LAST?

HOW THE CONSTELLATIONS AQUARIUS AND LEO GAVE THE IDEA TO THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS TO BUILD THE SPHINX WITH THE HEAD OF A MAN AND THE BODY OF A LION.



THE famous Sphinx of Egypt has for centuries been one of the great mysteries of the world. What it signified to the ancient race that dwelt on the banks of the Nile, why and when it was built, why its peculiar form was given to it, have been questions as impossible to answer as its grim and majestic features have been inscrutable.

At last an investigator in America, Mr. Beswick, has propounded the theory that the Sphinx was erected in honor of the Winter solstice or midwinter. The lion's body, which is beneath the level of the earth in the Sphinx, represents the constellation Leo, which is below the horizon at the solstice, while the man's head above the earth represents the constellation Aquarius, which is above the horizon at the same period.

Myths and legends without number are associated with its history, yet the archaeologists have been hitherto unable to fathom the enigma of the great silent figure of man and lion that is almost human in its expression and so profound and thoughtful in the intense stare of its big, cavernous eyes.

That this Egyptian Sphinx was of Assyrian origin, and that it served as a model, with certain modifications of form, for other sphinxes of lesser importance and historical fame, has been well known.

Notable among these is the Theban Sphinx, the author of the celebrated riddle, and the subject of Ingres's classic painting, reproduced on this page.

THE great Egyptian Sphinx is the most fascinating monument of antiquity that has come down to us. It is a work of wonderful majesty, and its chief characteristic has given to every civilized language a synonyme for mystery.

A riddle of the Sphinx was solved in Greek mythology, but the true riddle of the great Egyptian Sphinx remained unsolved for modern nations until the other day.

It has been discovered by Mr. S. Beswick, C. E., of Hollidaysburg, Pa., that the Sphinx had an exact astronomical, as well as a religious meaning for the ancient Egyptians. He is about to publish a book on this subject, and the salient points of this are printed in the Sunday Journal. This book is awaited with the deepest interest by scientific men, as may be judged from the statement of Professor Rees, of Columbia College, one of the leading astronomers of the country.

Mr. Beswick, who is English by birth, was a pupil of the great Dr. Dalton, of Manchester, and a member of the British Association. He is the inventor of a method of computing the magnetic declination of the needle.

Mr. Beswick has in fact solved the mystery of the Sphinx. He finds that the Egyptians built this colossal monument to commemorate the Winter solstice or midwinter, which was to them the most impressive event of the year. The Sphinx consists of the head of a man on the body of a lion. A royal crown is on the head. It was placed in a great amphitheatre, the body below the level of the earth and the head above. This represents the exact position of the constellations Leo, the Lion, and Aquarius, the Water Bearer, in the heavens at midwinter. Aquarius is represented in astronomy as a man. At midwinter Leo is below the horizon and the head of Aquarius just above.

The Winter solstice appeared portentous to the ancient Egyptians in their early history, because when the days became very short they believed the light of the sun was going out forever. Then the rulers of the land erected this monument to remind the people that the heavens moved in a regular course, and as an act of reverence to the celestial bodies.

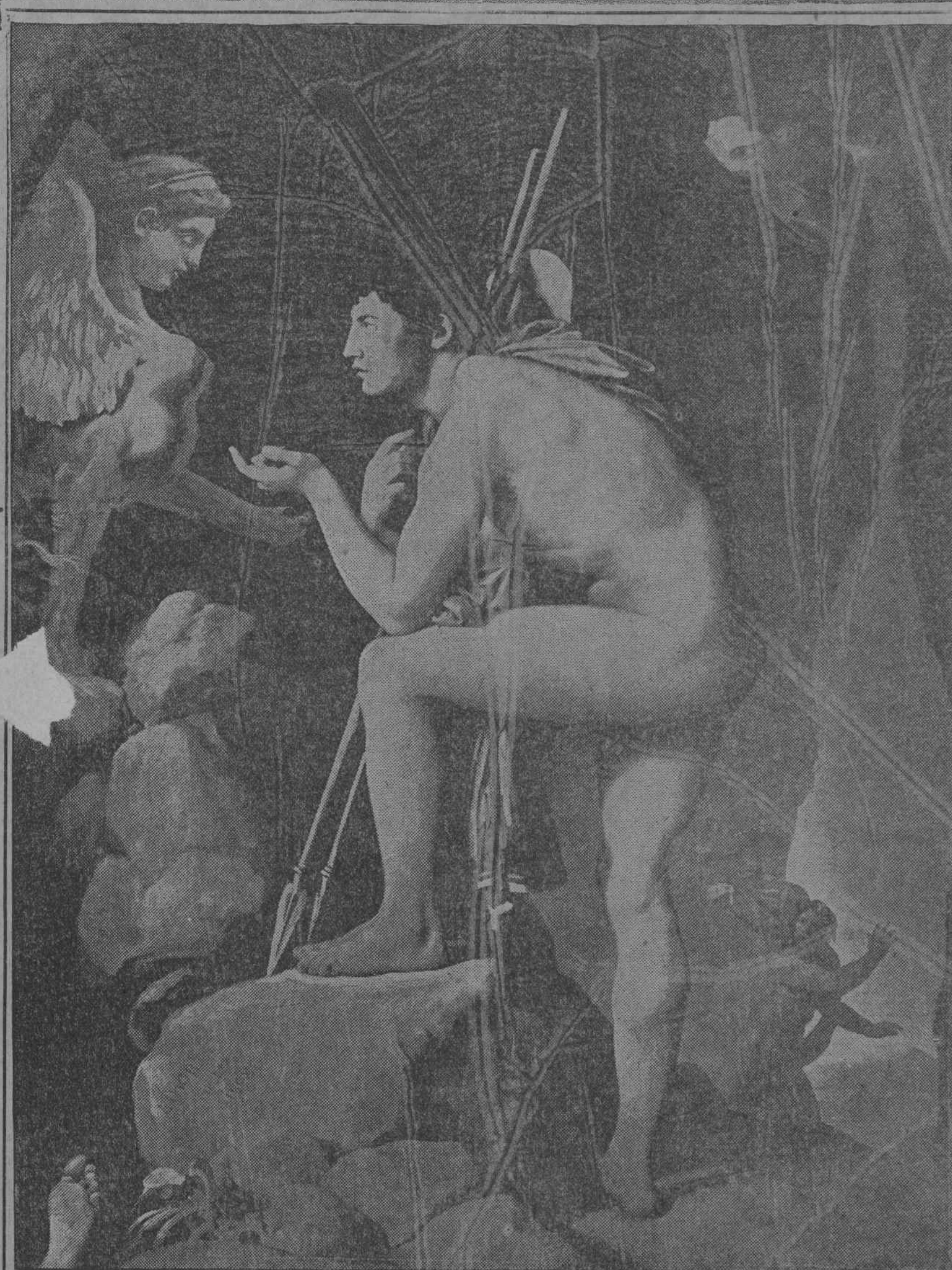
The great Sphinx rises out of the desert near Gizeh, in Egypt. It is a neighbor of the Pyramids, with which it is intimately associated in history and meaning. For more than twenty centuries the great human-headed lion with the majestic and mysterious face has gazed on the world. Napoleon reviewed his soldiers in its shadow and said to them: "Twenty centuries look down upon you." The face has been disfigured by the elements and by religious fanatics, who saw in its inscrutable expression an object of dread and evil; but neither time nor man has been able to obliterate the majesty of the great monument.

It is strange that modern people should have remained in ignorance of the meaning of a monument which was erected to correct the ignorance of primitive Egyptians. Innumerable theories as to its significance have been entertained. It was said to represent the Nephilim or Gihborim giants of Oriental mythology who perished before the flood. More recent investigators thought it the likeness of the king who erected it, but the fact that it had the upturned head of a god seems fatal to this.

Mr. Beswick bases his theory on the universally admitted fact that Egyptian religion was inextricably bound up with astronomy. In addition to the religious and astronomical significance of the Sphinx, the man's head and lion's body symbolized the union of intellect and strength.

In the Sphinx the entire body of the lion is buried and sunk below the horizon in solid rock to represent the constellation of Leo, which is sunk below the celestial horizon at the moment when the sun seems to stand still (the solstice), while the head of the constellation Aquarius at the same moment is at the Winter solstice ascending above the horizon. The epoch represented by the Sphinx was that of the Autumnal beginning of the primal year, with the sun in Aquarius at the Winter solstice.

Now, if a celestial map or chart of the heavens is examined,



OEDIPUS SOLVING THE RIDDLE OF THE THEBAN SPHINX.

(Reproduced from the Famous Painting by Ingres, in the Louvre.)

The Theban Sphinx, according to the fable, proposed a riddle to the people, and put to death all who could not answer it. No one succeeded in answering the riddle, which was: "What is that which is four-footed, three-footed and two-footed?" Finally the great Oedipus, King of Thebes, gave the correct answer, "Man," who is four-footed in infancy, three-footed in old age, when he walks with the help of a cane, and two-footed the rest of his life. Thereupon the Sphinx, so the fable runs, slew herself. The Theban Sphinx figured prominently in the Grecian mythology and was also a favorite subject of the Greek dramatists. In the Grecian fable the Sphinx was female.

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MR. BESWICK'S theory is interesting and based upon a very ingenious argument. It would not be at all surprising if the Egyptians had preserved something of their astronomical conceptions in their stone monuments. That the pyramids had some astronomical purpose has long been the belief of modern astronomers. Professor Proctor holds that at one time the apex of the pyramid was not built—a level space being left to serve as a platform for astronomical observations. Others have held that what are now termed ventilators—the spaces running from the base of the pyramid to the exterior—may have served as dark tubes for the study of the stars, the observer standing at the interior end of the base of the monument.

I shall be glad to see Mr. Beswick's book on the subject of the Sphinx and pyramids, so as to ascertain his proofs for the contention that the Sphinx represents Aquarius and Leo. It is an interesting suggestion which a further astronomical calculations may prove.

It will be seen how the Sphinx has been constructed and formed out of the constellations Leo and Aquarius. At the moment of midwinter the track of the earth around the sun (ecliptic) appears in the southern half of the heavens and the half of the sun's circuit, including the whole body of Leo, or the lion, is apparently below the horizon. This would be the exact combination which forms this ancient stone monument—the head of Aquarius above the body of Leo, with the entire body of Leo sunk below the horizon.

As thus constructed the Sphinx, to the Egyptian of three thousand years ago, was the embodiment of the most wonderful occurrence within his ken. When he saw the days growing shorter and shorter, the destruction of the world seemed imminent; he thought that all would soon be swallowed up in darkness. But when the solstice passed and the days again lengthened he noted the position of the constellations, personified and worshipped them. He did the same at the Summer solstice, when the days began to lengthen.

The Sphinx was doubtless a creation of the scientific priests of On or Heliopolis, and formed a part of the astronomical system which then prevailed, and which has also been embodied in the Great Pyramid. We have both direct and indirect proof that the Sphinx and Pyramid belonged to the same era.

To the priests the Sphinx was known as Harmachis. Harmachis is the youthful rising sun called "Horus to the Horizon."

When the priests of On built the Sphinx they hollowed out in a rocky plateau an immense basin or amphitheatre, in the middle of which the natural rock was left as a central core, so as to be sculptured into the mammoth stone monument. A sloping descent of 135 feet of steps was cut in rock forty feet wide as a gradual approach to the platform area. This magnificent astronomical symbol is sixty-four feet high, as we now find it, with a platform beneath it.

The body of the Sphinx is 140 feet in length; the head measures about thirty feet from the top of the forehead to the chin and is fourteen feet wide.

The Sphinx is an essential adjunct to the Great Pyramid, and was erected simultaneously or during the same period. The astronomical evidence and features are absolutely identical. Mr. Beswick demonstrates some remarkable mathematical coincidences which apply to both, but they are understandable, however, only by the astronomer. By calculation he proves that the Pyramid and Sphinx were erected 2782 B. C., the only time at which the astronomical combination symbolized by their dimensions was possible.

The Sphinx belongs not only to Egypt, but is found in all ancient civilizations.

The Assyrians, whose civilization preceded the Egyptians, created Sphinxes. What the Sphinx meant to the ancient Assyrians is still a moot question among Assyriologists. Whole avenues of Sphinxes are found leading up to the ruined temples though these often take the form of winged bulls. But the fact that the Assyrians were great astronomers, that they erected huge stage-towers (the antecedents of the Pyramids), as observatories, would seem to show that their Sphinxes also had some astronomical bearing.

From Assyria the Sphinx and the Pyramid were transferred to Egypt, according to the latest conclusions of such investigators as De Morgan. And from Egypt the Sphinx and such of Egyptian culture are known to have been carried to Greece.

In Greece, Sphinxes were prominent in mythology and in the classical dramas of the great Greek writers. The Theban Sphinx was probably second in historical fame and classic importance to the Great Sphinx of Egypt. It was the Theban Sphinx which, according to the fable, propounded the celebrated riddle which has been handed down through the centuries in all the school books, and which punished with death all the hapless Thebans who failed to answer the riddle correctly. The Greek Sphinx had usually the winged body of a lion and the face and breast of a young woman.

Our word "Sphinx" is derived from the Greek, meaning "a throttler." That is essentially a Greek significance, derived from the Theban Sphinx. In the light of the latest discovery there is no reason for giving so harsh a name to the great Egyptian Sphinx.